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C O N F I D E N T I A L USOSCE 000102

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STATE FOR VCI/CCA, EUR/PRA, EUR/RPM, SCA/CEN  
JCS FOR COL NORWOOD  
OSD FOR ISA (PERENYI)  
NSC FOR DOWLEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2009

TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: OPEN SKIES TREATY: UK TO CEASE ACTIVE FLIGHTS DUE  
TO MOD BUDGET CUTS

REF: MARVIN-VCI/CCA EMAIL 4/4/08

Classified By: AC Chief Delegate Hugh Neighbour

1.(C) Summary. UK delegation reps in Vienna have informed the U.S. and many other delegations, including Russia, that it will no longer be able to participate in active Open Skies Treaty observation flights due to ongoing MOD budget cuts. This is a serious development by a leading Ally in the Treaty, and one which poses several policy-related questions for Washington's consideration: Would a bilateral approach appealing the decision mitigate the outcome? Is the U.S. able to share some missions using the U.S. aircraft so the UK can continue to participate? Does the U.S. want to bid on timeslots that the UK will forfeit by this decision? Request Washington review and consideration for next steps in Vienna, and as appropriate, London. Action requests in paras 4, 5, and 8. End Summary.

Why buy when you can rent?  
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12. (SBU) This week, UK reps told USDel that MOD budgets were forcing a decision to forego any future active observation flights after the end of April. The UK Open Skies aircraft (Andover) has reached its lifespan, and is too expensive to maintain. No replacement aircraft is envisioned or fiscally feasible at this time. However, this decision will apparently only net a savings of 400,000 British pounds (about USD 200,000). Unfortunately, MOD appears unwilling to even consider leasing another aircraft, such as the Swedish Saab, which runs about \$40K per mission ) which presumably would be affordable several times per year. Comment: the UK aircraft, irreverently called by the Brits a "bucket of bolts flying in formation," has been on its last legs for years, so the lifespan issue is not a surprise. Replacement costs are understandably high, but leasing other aircraft would appear to be feasible and relatively inexpensive. End Comment.

13. (SBU) UK reps have stressed that the MOD decision is

purely driven by financial constraints, and does not represent any policy decisions to withdraw support from the Treaty. Nor is it in reaction to other arms control developments in Europe (e.g., current Russian suspension of the CFE Treaty.) The UK will continue to accept observation flights from Treaty partners, and will participate in the OSCC in Vienna.

Demarche to London?  
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¶4. (C) Comment and Action request 1: Even if the decision is purely a financial one, cessation of flights by a leading European Ally will nevertheless reflect poorly on the importance and viability of the Open Skies Treaty. Other nations may well begin to wonder why they should continue to participate if it is not important to a country like the UK. The UK rep (MacLeod) said a demarche to London from Washington could help mitigate the decision, although she was uncertain whether even that would be sufficient to reverse it altogether. We welcome Washington consideration of the UK suggestion for a demarche. Please advise if Washington wishes to pursue that action. End Comment and action request.

Share with UK?  
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¶5. (C) Action request 2: As of May 2008, the UK will not conduct any of its remaining quota flights for 2008. Per Reftel, USDel forwarded a request from the UK concerning an option to share its already scheduled timeslot for a mission to Russia in week 22 (May 26-30) if the U.S. could provide the aircraft. If so, we believe it would be possible for the

UK to send a few representatives along in order for it to use one of its remaining quotas. We have asked the UK del to confirm this possibility and will update Washington accordingly. We have not told the UK whether the U.S. could provide an aircraft. Please provide guidance. End action request.

How to best use timeslots reserved by the UK  
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¶6. (C) The UK decision will also result in other timeslots becoming available on the schedule. The UK has reserved week 33 (11-15 August) and week 43 (20-24 October). The October week would have been a joint mission shared with Slovenia. Without the UK aircraft, Slovenia will be looking for a new partner with an aircraft if it hopes to execute this quota flight over Russia. USDel believes Slovenia would welcome the chance to share a mission with us. If it does not find a new partner it will not be able to exercise its quota over Russia.

¶7. (C) Comment: This unfortunate UK development offers an opportunity for the U.S. to support a strong Ally during a difficult period, as well as a relatively new Ally (Slovenia). It also offers the U.S. the chance to bid on several timeslots that would allow us to maximize our quota flights during optimal weather conditions. Other States Parties may also be interested in these timeslots, so if we would like them we should make that known to others sooner rather than later. There is also the possibility that if we do not attempt to use these timeslots, others may not step forward to do so, and the three UK quotas over Russia would not be utilized this year at all.

¶8. (C) Action Request 3: Request Washington review the current planning calendar, U.S. aircraft availability, and mission planning priorities, in light of this development with an eye toward supporting our Allies, as well as maximizing U.S. mission opportunities. Please advise on U.S. preferences so we can inform Allies in advance of the third quarter deconfliction meeting in early May. End Action Request.

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